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RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Letter dated 8 February 1995 from the Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to the United Nations Office at Geneva addressed to the Chairman of the Commission on Human Rights

I have the honour to address you in your capacity as the Chairman of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights on the eve of the deliberations of the Commission and to request you kindly to acquaint it with our position on the protection of the rights of the child by circulating this letter as an official document of the fifty-first session of your Commission, under item 24 (Rights of the child).

I have in mind the disastrous effects upon children in all the countries suffering under the regime of internationally imposed sanctions and embargoes.

Millions of children in my country are in immediate jeopardy because of sanctions: the lack of basic necessities for growing children is damaging not only their physical and mental health, but also their education and other essential aspects of development, despite the fact that, formally, they are protected under the principles and regulations of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

At present, there are close to 300,000 refugee children from the former republics of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia - Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina - Serbs, Croats, Muslims, as well as other nationalities from these territories. These children have been punished in three ways: first, they are the direct victims of war in which they have lost, in many cases, their entire family; second, they have been punished by the very fact that they have lost their homes and have become refugees; and last, they have been punished by the international community since, having sought security and a safe haven in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, they suffer, along with all

Yugoslav children, the appalling effects that sanctions inflict upon the most vulnerable categories of the population.

You are probably aware that UNICEF has already been insisting on such protection for some time. The late UNICEF Executive Director, Mr. James Grant, referred to this problem as a priority in his speech to the Third Committee of the forty-ninth session of the United Nations General Assembly.

Bearing in mind that, unfortunately, the number of children in the world suffering under internationally imposed sanctions has greatly increased in recent years and that a large number of alarming reports have been issued by Governments, United Nations specialized agencies and bodies, as well as NGOs, on the traumatic impact of this deprivation on children, we strongly believe that it is indispensable for the Commission to take into consideration this tragic problem, within its deliberations under item 24. We urge the Commission to make concrete proposals for safeguarding the fundamental rights of children affected by sanctions and embargoes, as guaranteed under the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Along these lines, we suggest the following to be inserted in the resolution:

"1. Expresses its concern in view of the increasing number of reports on the serious situation of the children in the countries under the sanctions and embargoes;

"2. Strongly recommends that the decisions of the relevant United Nations bodies imposing the regime of sanctions and embargoes upon countries should include a 'child impact assessment', describing their possible impact upon the children, as well as detailed specific measures which would ensure the protection of the basic rights of the children under such conditions."

Also, we are of the view that this aspect should be a part of the mandate of the expert, Mrs. Graça Machel, appointed by the United Nations Secretary-General in accordance with General Assembly resolution 48/157, to elaborate a study on the situation of children affected by armed conflicts.

Excellency, I wish to stress that this question is relevant not only to the children of my country and those who have fled to Yugoslavia in order to protect their very lives, but to all children bearing the brunt of sanctions. It is impermissible for the children of any nation to become an endangered species.

In the hope of receiving your early favourable response and your joining this humanitarian action, I ask you, dear Mr. Chairman, to please accept the assurances of my highest consideration.

(Signed) Vladimir Pavićević